

The Hebrew Corner

Some of the greatest miracles of the Bible concern God granting of the ability of the woman to conceive a child, sometimes after years of barrenness, and frequently well past her child-bearing years. The first passage we will look at is the following passage from Genesis concerning the conception of Joseph by Rachel (Genesis 30:22-23):

“And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach: And she called his name Joseph; and said, the LORD shall add to me another son.”

It is important to consider two Hebrew words used in this passage. Zakar (זָכַר, zah-CHAR) is the Hebrew verb translated in the passage as remembered. However, this verb has a connotation in Hebrew that extends the meaning. It means not simply to bring to mind but also to take action accordingly. Zakar implies an active role, not only a mental activity. The second Hebrew word concerns the name that Rachel gave to her son, Joseph, which is from the verb yasaf (יָסַף, yah-SAHF) meaning to increase. In fact, due to Joseph's favor and position given to him by the Egyptian pharaoh, the descendants of Israel were able to increase in number, massing to a formidable nation. An important principle is on display in the passages concerning Leah and Rachel in Genesis. Leah was using child-bearing as a means of gaining the love of Jacob, but in contrast when Rachel finally gave birth to a child, she simply credited God for the blessing she was given. The message for us is that there is nothing we can do to earn the love of God, yet he is always looking to have a closer relationship with us. We need to give God freely of

our time and resources, always looking to draw closer to God every day.

Another important principle to be found in the book of Genesis is that God keeps his promises in his own timing, and in ways no one can anticipate. As described in Genesis 17 and 18, God had made a covenant with Abraham that he would make a great nation out of his descendants. Many years had passed since the promise was made, yet Sarah had not conceived, so Abraham and Sarah decided to fulfill the promise by having Abraham father a child by Sarah's handmaid Hagar. The child of the covenant, however, was to come well after the normal child-bearing years of Sarah were over, when she was ninety years old. This child of the covenant was the only son of Abraham and Sarah, who was named Isaac. Isaac in Hebrew is yitshak (יִצְחָק, yihts-CHAK) , meaning in English, he laughs, a fitting name since both Abraham and Sarah laughed when God told them they were going to have a child in their old age. It seems that God always has the last laugh, since the plans that he makes are beyond human comprehension.

The Hebrew word dan (דָּן, DAHN) means judge, so it is not surprising that in the book of Judges, we are told of a miraculous birth in the tribe of Dan (Judges 13: 1-25):

“And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years. And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. Now therefore beware, I pray

thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name: But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death. Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born. And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband was not with her. And the woman made haste, and ran, and shewed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day. And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, I am. And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him? And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware. She may not eat of any thing that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing: all that I commanded her let her observe. And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee. And the angel of the Lord said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt

offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the LORD. And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour? And the angel of the Lord said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret? So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wonderously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground. But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the LORD. And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God. But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these. And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.”

Samson did not live up to the promise of his miraculous birth, acting in prideful and unwise ways. The story, however, previews another miraculous birth that would happen over 1000 years later (Luke 1:5-25):

“There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and

ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless. And

it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.”

The story continues with Zacharias, who was struck dumb due to his unbelief, writing the name translated as “John” on a writing table, and then, being filled with the Holy Spirit and no longer speechless, lifting up praise to God for the birth of his son, John the Baptist. Yet this was a prelude to the most miraculous childbirth of all (Luke 1:26-37):

“And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be

born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible.”

The rest of the story is familiar to us, the birth of Jesus our Yeshua, the salvation of all mankind. We should always keep in mind that God is able to do a multitude of things that are beyond our abilities. And so we need to pray constantly to God for help in the situations that we face every day. Sometimes he will guide us to do what he wants us to do, sometimes he will act on our behalf. In any case, his way is going to be the best way, and for him, “nothing is impossible.” May you have a great month, and as once again I am writing these words on Saturday afternoon, Shabbat Shalom to you!